

DURHAM MINERS' GALA

a celebration of trade unionism and community spirit

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Contents

3 Introduction: Kevin Maguire,
Associate editor, *The Mirror*

4 History of the Durham Miners' Gala

5 Durham Miners' Gala timeline

6 The Gala in pictures

7 Why we do the Gala

8 Communities under strain

10 What the Gala means to us



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and the Durham
Miner's Gala
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Durham Miners' Gala

A time to celebrate, a time to remember



Kevin Maguire, Associate Editor of the Daily Mirror and friend of HOPE not hate

Every pit village in the Durham coalfield has a tribute to the miners who lost their lives fighting fascism.

Their names are on cenotaphs, listed alongside all those other brave souls who fell saving Britain from Hitler and Mussolini during the Second World War. So many colliers put down picks and shovels to pick up rifles, joining in their droves the Durham Light Infantry in particular, the government was forced to stop them leaving the Durham mines in 1941 because coal was needed to fuel the war effort.

Then, at the end of 1943, mining conscription was introduced to send so-called Bevin Boys down the pits. The patriotism of the Durham miners was legendary. For an entire year, each donated a penny a week from their wages to buy a couple of Spitfires to shoot down Luftwaffe bombers. The spirit of the time was captured at the final Durham Miners' Gala before the 1939-45 struggle against the authoritarian nationalism of fascism, an evil creed of racism at the end of a jackboot. Will Lawther, President of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, who'd briefly been Labour MP for Barnard Castle, told the Big Meeting: "To us, fascism means the end of all our hopes and aspirations. Therefore, the miners call upon their brother miners the world over for unity in that fight to overcome the common foe."

The Hope not Hate expressed by

Lawther captured a spirit of mining communities which endures long after the mines have gone. It is a potent mix of self-help and co-operation, extending the hand of friendship to live and work together. As the son of a Durham miner – and my brother was working at Westoe Colliery in South Shields when the Tories shut it in an unforgivable act of industrial and social vandalism – I love how we in the hard-hit North East still take great pride in our friendly reputation.

Maybe it's because we're a meld of so many peoples. The Romans came and were this side of Hadrian's Wall. The Danes, Norsemen and Vikings left their heritage in family names and places. William the Conqueror's lot from France built the magnificent Norman Cathedral atop a hill in Durham City, a gift from Europe and a beacon to the world. The Irish migrated to Durham in their tens of thousands. My home town of South Shields has a Yemeni community dating back to the late 19th century.

I was an excited schoolboy in 1977 when Muhammad Ali, heavyweight champion of the world, visited the local mosque for his wedding to be blessed. The Poles who come to the area today follow in the footsteps of Polish miners who worked in the pits after the Second World War. We've embraced the best food and football the world has to offer. Indian and Chinese takeaways and restaurants are popular.

At the Stadium of Light we cheer Benin's Stephane Sessegnon. Up the road at

St James' Park the roar is for Senegal's Papiss Cisse. But we must beware those who would divide and destroy, the evil racists who preach prejudice and plot to turn neighbour against neighbour. There's nothing British about the intolerant BNP. The violent hooligans of the misnamed English Defence League, terrifying good people. The nasty wing of UKIP bring shame on the nation.

The Durham Miners' Association looks outwards not inwards. The honour of addressing the Gala includes guests from as far away as Australia. Towards the end of the abhorrent apartheid era in South Africa, when the majority black population was treated like slaves and denied the vote, a delegation of South African miners were invited to spend three weeks with the families of Durham pitmen.

It was the first time the black South Africans had socialised with white people. And the first time they had seen white people doing manual labour. They were treated like brothers and sisters. In 2004, to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the end of apartheid, Lindiwe Mabuza, South Africa's High Commissioner in London, spoke at the Big Meeting and brought an Anglo Gold Choir which wowed the crowds on the racecourse and outside the County Hotel.

Macho men were reduced to tears.

Let's enjoy this July's Gala together and make the future one of HOPE not hate.

Durham's Big Meeting

The Durham Miners' Gala, affectionately known as the 'Durham Big Meeting', is the UK's oldest (first held in 1871) and largest annual demonstration of working class culture, community and politics.

Held every July in the heart of Durham, it is attended by more than 100,000 people celebrating Durham's coal mining heritage and the historic strength of trade unionism and community spirit in the Durham coalfield.

In 1945, there were over 100 collieries and 112,000 miners in Durham but now, the industry having

been destroyed by the Thatcher government, none remain. The Durham Miners' Association (DMA) has, nevertheless, ensured the Gala is still a central rallying point for those wanting a better, more equal society.

The event plays host to Labour and trade union leaders as well as guests involved in workers' struggles internationally. In 2012, two Spanish striking miners addressed the rally to a rapturous reception.

HOPE not hate fully supports the DMA's ongoing campaign to guarantee the Gala's future.



The Gala: historical highlights

12 AUGUST 1871

First Gala. Miners' leader William Crawford, addressed the crowd, behind him the banner of Thornley Colliery.



Early 1920s

Miner's banners featuring Marx and Lenin appear in the Durham coalfield.



1932

Gala held in depressed times following financial crash and Ramsay MacDonald's decision to desert the Labour Party. 70,000 Durham miners now unemployed.

1937

Professor Harold Laski denounces Nazi sympathiser and brutal Durham coal owner Lord Londonderry.



1892

Year of the Durham Lockout. Wages slashed by 10%. Durham miners' leaders seek mandate to fight for the eight-hour day.

1912

First ever national miners' strike for a national minimum wage.

1926 GENERAL STRIKE

No Gala as Durham miners hold out till November, having been on strike at many pits for 14 months.



Byers Green striking miners 1926

1905

First Independent Labour MP Keir Hardie on the speakers' platform.



1921 and 1922

No Gala after the 1921 national dispute in which miners were locked out for three months, fighting wage cuts, after being betrayed, on "Black Friday" by railway and transport workers' union leaders.

1925

Miners' leader AJ Cook declares: "Not a penny off the pay, not a minute on the day" replying to government demands for wage cuts and extended working hours. The Dean of Durham almost thrown in the River Wear by angry miners



1928

Communist MP Shapurji Saklatvala the first black person to grace the Gala platform.

1934

Jarrow MP Ellen Wilkinson warns the Gala of the fascist danger, slamming it as "capitalism's last big trick".



1938

DMA announces it has sent £15,000 (£840,000 in today's terms!) to help widows and children of the 3,000 Spanish colliers slaughtered by Franco's fascist troops.



1884

Women's rights activist Annie Besant is the first woman to be invited to speak.



The Gala: Why we organise it

DMA General Secretary, Dave Hopper writes:

'WE ORGANISE the Durham Miners Gala first and foremost because it is an important part of the history and heritage of the people of Durham, a yearly focus of Durham life for 142 years.

In 1871, the Durham Miners Association held the first Gala, or Big Meeting as it is known in Durham, as a show of strength and a drive for union recruitment but it soon assumed a symbolic character, galvanising our people into a united body of men and women around the principles of trade unionism and each looking after all.

These principles have, however, been under attack for the last 30 years. First, by a vengeful Tory government and then by New Labour which refused to repeal Thatcher's vicious anti-trade union legislation.

A Labour Party, which

Durham miners especially always considered *their* party, was hijacked by people who took the country into wars which destroyed the lives of more than 100,000 people, left services' families in grief, and made the world a more dangerous place.

Thatcher's policies, which encouraged the greed of bankers – and the continuation of the same policies under Labour – hastened the total collapse of the banking system for which the poorest are now being made to pay. The economic hardship inflicted on communities throughout Britain creates a dangerous situation which is being exploited by racists and fascists.

So the Gala is more vital than ever and assumes a new significance as a focus of opposition to these attacks. Demonstrations are vital to



the process of building and co-ordinating resistance in the spirit of community, which is central to the Big Meeting's long history.

Thatcher and the Tories may have destroyed our industry but the people of Durham show the world, in our colourful parade of bands and banners, that we still have pride in our communities and our rich history and are prepared to fight to defend them from further attack.

We invite you all to join with us on July 13 to tell this uncaring Tory/Liberal government that the British people are not going to be driven back to the poverty our parents and grandparents suffered in the 1930s Depression. Nor are we going to be dragged into another war of destruction to solve the problems of a system in terminal decay.





The Gala lives!

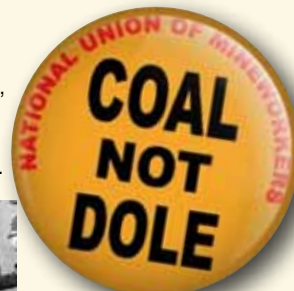


1959
National Health Service founder and ex-Welsh miner Aneurin Bevan speaks, terminally ill, at the 'Big Meeting' for the last time.



1975
Gala celebrates victory of 1974 strike and return of Labour Government.

1984-1985
Great strike against pit closures and for collieries, jobs, communities and union – the most bitter conflict in miners' history.



1993
No more working collieries in the once great Durham coalfield.



Photo: MuseumWales

1939
Miners' hymn Gresford – commemorating 1934 disaster at Gresford Colliery in North Wales in which 265 men were killed in underground explosion – played by massed brass bands.



1968
Labour PM Harold Wilson greeted with cries of "Labour traitor" after National Coal Board shuts 60 Durham pits.



1946
250,000 attend to hear Labour leader and PM Clement Attlee announce nationalisation of the mines ... but beer in short supply.

1961
Tanfield NUM Lodge brings US Air Force band to entertain the Gala crowds with American razzamatuzz.



1972
Durham miners celebrate victory over Tory Heath government in bitter seven-week strike for higher wages.

1983
New NUM president Arthur Scargill warns of Tory plans for savage pit closures.



1986
Gala takes place after strike defeat with new DMA leaders Dave Hopper and Dave Guy and opened up to other trade unions.

1994 to present
DMA fights to keep Gala going. More revived banners every year. Now regularly attended by over 100,000 who have jubilantly greeted events from the dismantling of apartheid to the remarkable 2010 rescue of 32 Chilean copper miners trapped for 69 days.





Communities

By Paul Meszaros

DEINDUSTRIALISATION is the greatest threat and tragedy that can befall a working class community.

If the reason for a community's existence is torn from it, what remains for people left behind and what does the future hold for subsequent generations? In extreme cases, communities die completely. Areas that have been dependent on one industry are particularly jeopardised. The end of North East shipbuilding, steel in Sheffield and textiles in Bradford, for instance, has left a hole that may never be filled.

Some places are luckier than others in attracting new industries and bigger cities can often prove more resilient. But what happens to those areas which are completely dependent on one industry?

The economic carnage inflicted on our communities is obvious but the damage and wounds go much deeper.

Much of our working class culture and identity is shaped by the industry that involved local people. The decline or wholesale closure of an industry does not just mean economic degradation, it also threatens to rip the guts out of a community's cultural and social being.

Mining villages and the coalfields generally have suffered particularly as a result of pit closures. Areas and communities which existed almost solely for the provision of coal are left bereft and abandoned when pits go.

It is testament to generations of miners and their families that life has been able to go on. Decades before Tory millionaires spouted nonsense about the 'Big Society', mining communities had – by their own work, self-sacrifice and solidarity – created the mechanisms to look after people falling on hard times.

Miners' welfare clubs were the living embodiment of this, providing support

and help long even before the creation of the welfare state. Tight-knit communities galvanised by common experience and hard, dangerous work created bonds of solidarity. They also created a legacy that is both enduring and fragile. These values of solidarity, mutual responsibility and brotherhood were created inadvertently by an industry that has now gone. It is thanks to the powerful organisations that miners built that these values have endured.

In many places, we are at a crossroads as our traditional values come under threat, underlining the importance of the Durham Miners Gala.

On this great day we celebrate the legacy, the comradeship and the importance of an industry once so vital for the nation. But more importantly,

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we celebrate our collective values and re-affirm our commitment to them. At Durham, we pledge that however fragile they appear, the values which make up our notions of solidarity will not disappear.

The threats to them are real: we have seen far-right groups do well in mining villages in South Yorkshire. The nazi British National Party, which – let us never forget – sided with Thatcher during the Great Strike, has gained votes by pretending to hold our values. The English Defence League has latched onto local disputes and tensions, such as in

Shotton, County Durham, to try to whip up racism and division.

We must remain vigilant and reject these groups and their hate-filled ideas that are the exact opposite of everything we stand for. Let us also never forget the mass murders perpetrated by Franco's fascists against miners and their families in Spain and by Hitler's Nazis in Lidice, a pit village in Czechoslovakia, whose postwar rebuilding was entirely paid for by Durham, Staffordshire and Cumberland miners.

So, which way forward?

By sticking together we can defend our heritage, not just annually at Durham, but by working in communities with our people, re-affirming the rightness of our values, especially with the younger generations whose world of work is so different from their forebears.

But we will go further. We will not ask, but *demand* of our politicians that they do better. Our communities cannot be left to stagnate and die; the free market can go to hell if it cannot deliver for us.

We need good quality affordable housing – a basic right. We want proper, well paid jobs – another basic right. We want to know that our children have future, opportunities for meaningful training and education.

Never mind Cameron's 'Big Society', we need no lectures from him about building society. We believe in it – they don't. But to achieve it we need investment: real money to be spent in areas that once provided so much but are now struggling through no fault of their own.

By investing in our communities through public works and infra-structure projects, not only will we be making a pledge for future generations, we will be tackling problems of the here and now and undermining the efforts of our fascist enemies to exploit the situation. ●

under strain



The Gala: What it means to us

“

The Durham Miners' Gala has always been an important family day for me. It changed over the years from being an excited child eager to go to the fair, to a teenager enjoying the day with friends and now to a parent enjoying spending the day as a family with my son. It is an important day for working class families as it is a reminder to all of us that there are people who want to make changes for the working class, and those people come together each year to try and make sure those changes happen.



Corina Moore

miner's daughter, Sherburn Hill, Durham

“

Durham Miners' Gala is the most important political date in the DMA diary. It means such a great deal to me and the many thousands of ex-miners, their families and communities who support a democratic society: a gathering of hope and a vision for years to come, a belief that young people of today will understand why we carry our banners high and meet so proudly at the Gala.



Derek Sleightholme

former miner Washington Glebe Colliery

“

The Gala never fails to lift my spirits. When I march behind our banner I feel proud of what we have done. Proud of the times my union stood up and fought in 1972, 1974 and, of course, the long strike of 1984/85. Some people will never have experienced the feeling of pride in a banner and in a community the banner represents. There is sadness too. When the band plays the miners' hymn Gresford, I think of all those miners who perished in explosions and the heartache it brought to villages.



Jack McCowcliff

ex-miner Wearmouth Colliery and Boldon Banner Group

“

Durham Miners' Gala is not only a joyous and colourful spectacle of bands and banners parading through the streets of Durham, but a tangible reminder of the proud spirit of the former mining communities. Each former colliery has its own unique banner and the day culminates with a special Miners' Service in Durham Cathedral to honour the lives of miners and their families and the hardships they faced to provide vital fuel for the country.



Patricia Simmons

Lambton and Houghton Banner Group

“



Lawrence Claughan

ex-miner Sacriston Colliery and Sacriston Restoration Group

For me, the Gala is the best day of the year. It gives you a real lift because we are saying that these are our values. They may have closed all the pits in Durham but we are still here and we haven't changed our ideas. We still believe in a society that cares for its people. I think the Gala's more important now than it has been in the last 50 years.

“

I am one of those thousands of women who met their husbands at the Big Meeting so it will always be special for me. I was 16 at the time and I can count on one hand how many Galas I have missed since then and now I meet my grandchildren there every year. It's a great occasion and I think we need the Gala now more than ever because there are hard times ahead and the Gala brings people together and helps us to believe that we can fight back against what this Government is trying to do.

Jean Temple

daughter and wife of a miner, Durham

“



Barry Chambers

ex-miner Blackhall Colliery and Blackhall Banner Group

The Big Meeting is the pride and joy of most Durham people. We were first taken to it as toddlers and we grew up with it. Before we could read the name on the banner we were told to memorise the pictures so if we got lost we could find our way back to the banner. It wasn't just a day of music and fun but part of who the people of Durham are and the long struggle for our rights which made us what we are.

“



Janet Blackburn

Bowburn Banner Group

The Miners' Gala demonstrates how Durham people celebrate heritage, hard work, struggle, neighbourliness and family.

Please help us secure the future of the Durham Miners' Gala

Join the Friends of the DMG Society here: www.durhamminers.org

Or obtain banker's order mandate from:

Friends of The Durham Miners' Gala, PO Box 6, Red Hill, Durham. DH1 4BB

"HOPE not hate campaign has been extraordinary and incredibly important. I want to thank you all for the hard work that you have done as part of our bigger movement."

FRANCES O'GRADY
General Secretary, TUC



"The need to organise against the fascists will never go away and so GMB will continue its work with Trade Union Friends of HOPE not hate."

PAUL KENNY
General Secretary, GMB

"UNISON is proud to continue working with the HOPE not Hate campaign, bringing our communities together in the face of those who seek to divide us."

DAVE PRENTIS
General Secretary, Unison



"The union is proud of its affiliation to Trade Union Friends of HOPE not hate at a national level. I would urge local divisions and associations of the NUT to consider local affiliation."

CHRISTINE BLOWER
General Secretary, NUT

Trade Union Friends



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